

Gay Rights are Human Rights: All Kids Deserve to be Safe in

In pre-school we are taught to share, be nice, and respect the feelings of others; but as we become adults some lose these essential values. Nationally racism and sexism have become less acceptable by society, but what about homophobia? With no [federal anti bullying laws](#) in place, kids, specifically LGBT youth, are not feeling safe in schools. While national political debates about gay rights commonly center on [gay marriage](#) and more recently on [discrimination in the work place](#), how much attention do the rights of LGBT kids and youth in schools receive? Statistics that have been put out by organizations such as the [Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network](#) and the [Human Rights Campaign](#), agree that LGBT youth are victims of bullying at higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts. It is because of these findings that federal legislation such as the [Obama administration endorsed Student Non-Discrimination Act](#) is necessary to protect all students.

According to the recent publication of the [Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network's 2011 National School Climate Survey](#), an alarming 81.9 percent of the youth who participated in the survey reported verbal abuse. Worst yet, more than half of the participants also reported homophobic remarks from teachers and other school staff. If students reported hearing adults at their school make racist or sexist remarks at any rate the teachers would be placed under investigation. This is the case in a New Jersey high school at

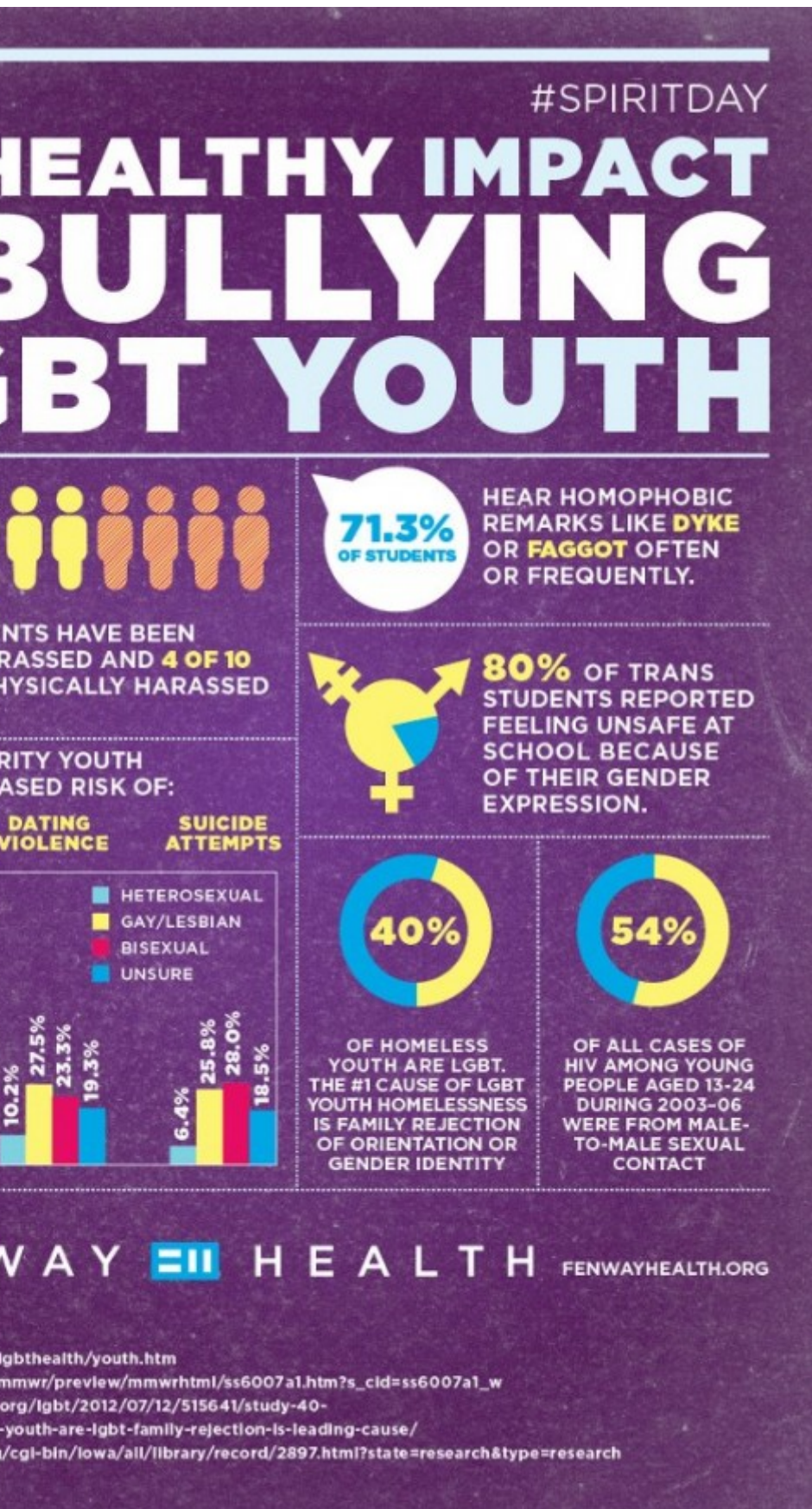
School

which a [teacher is under investigation for bullying students](#). Unfortunately, research shows that LGBT kids and youth are facing more than verbal abuse at their schools.

The 2012 infographic on [The Unhealthy Impact of Bullying on LGBT Youth](#) put out by [Fenway Health](#), shows that four of 10 LGBT students have been physically harassed in school. The infographic also shows that LGBT youth are at a higher risk of smoking, dating violence and suicide attempts. When adults do not support a measure as basic as including gay history in education, they send the message to kids and youth that LGBT people are different and unworthy. For example, how do you explain to a child that despite the adversities that [Harvey Milk](#), one of the first openly gay officials faced, his name and accomplishments should not be included in the history books?

In 2011 California Governor, Jerry Brown passed the [California Senate Bill 48](#) for inclusive education to include the contributions of LGBT people, people with disabilities and those of several ethnic groups in history and social study courses. The [Class Act Initiative](#) to repeal SB 48, which fortunately did not pass, argued that it would teach children to accept and endorse homosexuality. Although the opposition to bills such as SB 48 continues, the fact that gay history will be included in California is a sign of hope. Hope that some day all kids in school will feel safe despite their race, sex, abilities, and

sexual orientation or identification.



Impact of Bullying on LGBT Youth by Fenway Health

Oakland and Bullies Say, “Snitches Get Stitches, ” But Oakland

A well-known tactic of intimidation amongst the youth of Oakland is the saying that “Snitches get stiches,” which means that if students speak up about wrongs that they know of or are victims of, or “snitch”; they will suffer violent consequences. In the city of Oakland, violence is nothing new, however with increasing attention to the issue of bullying and talks of Federal Anti-Bullying legislation, the Oakland Unified School District is avidly doing its part to put a stop to it.

According to the [Huff Post Politics](#), although 49 states already address the issue of bullying in some way, currently, there is no Federal legislation in place; which is why Senator Bob Casey’s Safe Schools Improvement Act would hold schools accountable for collecting data on incidence and response.

Schools Create A Culture To End The Problem



The entrance to the Oakland Unified School District in Oakland, Calif., on Sunday, June 23, 2013.
(Photograph by: Natalie Rodriguez/Full Sail University)

California is one of the 49 states with [Anti-Bullying Laws and Policies](#) in place. Under these laws and policies, federally funded schools are

required by law to address and investigate cases of bullying. Troy Flint, Director of Public Relations at the Oakland Unified School District, says OUSDs policy on bullying "is that protection should be more than protection. Students need to be taught to respect difference whether it's ethnic, religious, people with disabilities, or gender or sexual orientation."

As a part of their effort to eradicate bullying, the district offers training for principals on how to recognize and prevent bullying, counselors who intervene in bullying cases, and complaint procedures. Flint talks about the opportunity that all middle and high school students were given to attend a screening of the Lee Hirsch documentary, [Bully](#) with an introduction and question and answer session with the director. Later the district formed a curriculum related to the film.

When Flint mentions that this issue is receiving increasing attention he also says, "I think attitudes are changing about what constitutes bullying and the impact it can have not only on a child's social life, but on their affinity for school, and their willingness to learn."

The fear of "snitches" getting "stitches" may be a real one, but the OUSD is making sure that its students know that they are not alone, they are watching, and they are working to create a culture of respect.